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Oral History, Sam Huck Oct. 15, 1998
with Laurie Horn and Evelyn McClure
for the Western Sonoma Co. Historical Society

E: Do you want to tell me about when your parents settled in the County, what year?

SH: My mother was born in Italy in 1895, Cujano (spelling?) her father, my grandfather left Italy in 1897 with a friend Andrew de Colombo to come to this country and worked for Southern Pacific in Colfax and brought the family over two years later. My mother had two older brothers, John and Louie and herself. At the time she got to the United States she was five years old. They landed at Ellis Island. Just my grandmother, my two uncles and my mother. They crossed the United States to Colfax, California. My grandfather had a place for them, there was a little shack. They lived there. My mother met my father who came from Michigan and settled in Colfax. In 1912 he opened the Colfax garage. It was a small town, only about 1,000 now, 700 then. In 1920 they got married in Auburn, the county seat. Julia Baroli, was my mother's name.

E: What's your father's ancestry?

SH: He came from Poland with his brothers and mother and they settled in Lansing, Michigan and his father died, had a stepfather. I don't know much about that side. I didn't know my grandfather. My grandmother on my mother's side I vaguely remember. I was a little guy when my grandfather passed away. He was young when he died.

E: Was the name changed when he came to the US?

SH: No, it was Huck. That part of it I don't know too much about on my father's side. Although my father went to work in the steel mills then he got to work for a doctor, was a chauffeur in Michigan. He started driving him all over the place. At one time he drove all the way to California. I think I have some old pictures out there on Mt.St. Helena (?) on 1914. I think they're still out there. He chauferred this old doctor and they came all the way across the US. He settled in Colfax in 1912. That means he went back to Michigan later on, well his brother was still back there in Chicago.Then he went into World War I. Then after the war. He was in the Signal Corps in WWI. He learned to fly and had a bunch of old planes after the war. Old Jennys. I don't know what year it was but he and Fitzgerald and the Guglielmetti boys. And old Jim Ford, you know where the Chevron station is across from the Laguna (off Highway 12) that used to be an airport. My dad and these other fellows they built that. It was an old wrecking yard. He was a pilot too. So they used to fly in and out of that old field there. Dad used to have 3 of those old airplanes.

E: How did he acquire them?

SH: He bought them surplus. They sold them after the war. That's where all the barnstormers got them. There was a picture around here of one that came in a crate. It was in the Times. It was in a crate. that was one of Dad's planes. I don't know where it came from. He used to fly all over the place and he'd go out in a field and put up a sign, and used to take people up and down. He used to

get pretty good (money, fees?) he used to go by Napa and around Sonoma County.

LH: What years?

SH: That was in, well I think he got his first airplane around 1923. My brother used to ride with him and I did later on. My brother was born in '26. He had them before that, say around 1920-23. They bought this place (Sam's house on South Main, Sebastopol) around 1922. There's a cornerstone in the garage with the date.

E: Did your father do this for an occupation?

SH: It was a hobby. He never did it, it wasn't his livelihood. He was originally a tool and die maker. Then he did electrical contracting but as part of that he used to rewind moters. Big ones and little ones. And when he first started getting the business, he used to go out and work on these dairies. They had no power in the old days so they had light plants and generators. He'd rebuild the engines and generators.He had a pretty good business.

E: He probably worked on the airplanes too?

SH: Oh yeah, but later you had to be certified. the FFA wouldn't let you do it. He did work on a lot of them. We had old planes when I was a kid. He flew way up into his later years. Into his 70s. He always had airplanes someplace. He had Pellini's garage, Pete Pellini, the old man always owned it. But years before Pete went into the auto business it was a battery shop. My Dad used to rebuild batteries. He'd burn the cells out. It was a good business. He did that a few years and had to quit it he got lead poisoning. But he survived it. It was quite interesting.

E: How long did the airport run?

SH: Well let's see it was still there after the War (WWII) I'd say until about 1950. When we were married, oh yeah, it was there until 1955. Once in a while people would use it but it would flood and the cows were walking on it. Boy when you'd land on that, I remember as a kid, you'd bounce all over the place. But it was long. They used to have an old grader to straighten it out once in a while. Jim Ford, I can't remember when they got rid of that old junk yard. When we had the old Plymouth I used to get parts for it. I used to get them from Jim Ford. Anyhow, Dad used to sell cars where the Shell station is on North Main St. There was a big warehouse next to it years ago. And Dad sold the old Daimler. That was in the early 20's and they sold one a year, not a lot. Then He and Roy Martin went into radios. They were building radios and selling them.

LH: Was Bill Borba involved with that?

SH: I don't think Bill was, do you remember Roy Martin?

LH: Yes.

SH: He was very good at it and so was my Dad, but I don't know what happened because he had at one time we had all these different radios and I guess what they did was they got the parts and assembled them. He used to sell them and when they were new it

was pretty good business. He and Roy, the old man, Martin they did a lot of winding motors. Some of them took a lot of time to do them. Then later he went into selling tools. He went to different shops. He was a pretty fair mechanic. Could figure anything out.I think the most interesting part was the old airplanes. And he flew. I have some old pictures.

LH: Dig them out.

SH: Yeah I'll have to, from the garage. I had some parts of one of the old planes and like a dunce, one time a fellow came up from San Rafael, he had a little museum down there of old airplane parts and stuff and I had a carburator from an old Jenny and some other parts and he asked to take them. I gave them to him and I don't know why today I did. I don't know what happened to them. I think the guy's name was Frisee or something. He was an old man, in late 70's they day he came up and that was a long time ago. About 1960.I gave him a strut and piston and the carbuerator from an old plane. When my Dad was flying, that one time, he used to teach a lot of people to fly. Remember the Buell's, Laurie? One of the Buell boys got killed. Dad was teaching him to fly, they were over Ed Gleason's place at Bodega and the kid froze on the stick and Dad couldn't get it away from him - they crashed and the kid got killed. Dad survived. Got a broken leg. The propeller off that plane, old Howard Williams had it for many years. It was broke in half. He had the half of it on his place on DuFranc (in Sebastopol) I saw it a couple time.

LH: I think the mother still lives there.

SH: Another time they were flying near the Laguna and something happened to one of the planes and it crashed. Dad never got hurt in that one. One time he and Muggs Poggi went to Fort Bragg. Dad took old Muggs along with him. He was a friend of Zimpher's. He had this four place Fairchild. They went to Grant's Pass. Started back and got in a storm. Got lost. Flew up the coast and got to Fort Bragg and knew where he was. Come in and about out of gas and kept buzzing town, the people in town figured he was trying to land the plane and they got out lights and lit up where he was coming in and he landed in the top of a cypress tree. I had that picture someplace. He and Muggs climbed down the tree. The Fire Dept. came out. He was ok in that one.

E: Its amazing your father survived through so many flights with these rickety planes.

SH: And they were rickety, put together with baling wire and stuff. There are a few old struts in the basement that my Dad made shelves out of. At one time he had an old engine from a Spad (?) A French plane. The cyclinders rotated on ball bearings. Every time the engine fired the whole cyclinder rotated. A 7 cyclinder. When I was in high school, Dad sold it (the plane) I don't know where it went. It should have been in a museum.

LH: Any other planes come into Sebastopol?

SH: Other pilots, oh yeah there was a lot of them. One of the first ones was Guglielmetti, he was one of the first pilots in Sonoma County. He used to fly the mail. Mike Corbett from

Cunningham, he flew, My Dad taught him how to fly. His brother Frank was a pilot in WWII, but he learned to fly before that too.

E: Any women pilots?

SH: Not that I know of.We had these Fairchild BP 26s, two of them at one time. Four place Fairchild, the Jenny, a Taylorcraft. He didn't have them all at once. The Fairchild was the last he had. He loved to fly.

LH: What did your mother think about his flying?

SH: She did not like it much. She was down there that one day when one plane fell out of the air. She told me about it. The engine quit. I guess the planes were pretty airworthy.

LH: Did your mother ever fly with your dad?

SH: Oh no, George Fraser (Sebastopol banker) told me he went up with Dad one time. Another guy, a family member told me Dad took him up and he wanted to come right down. George said he loved it. Jim Ford, I know he flew.

LH: Did Jim Ford have any family.

SH: He had two daughters. Jim Nagy about the same age as my brother, the same class. Jim said that one of the girls still lived in Santa Rosa. The old wrecking yard was the hanger, shaped like an airplane hanger.

LH: Someone lived upstairs and when it flooded, they took a picture of a boat going up to the upstairs to get the people out. That's how high the water was.

SH: The building was about 20 feet high. They had a big lift in it.

E: The building isn't there anymore.

SH: No its been gone, since the 50s. Was behind the gas station. Part of it was junk cars and set back 100 yards. There was a big oak tree and right there next to the tree was the hanger. And right next was the old slaughterhouse. It probably left about the same time.

LH: And dumps behind that.

SH: Right were the youth center is. The county dump and city disposal center.

L: We'd go down there and shoot rats.

SH: There were 1,000s of rats. I had a dog he caught 40 of em one day. He'd jump up and down on the pile and rats would be running all over the place. Boy he was fast, he'd snap their necks and go after another one. He loved it. Everybody's dog..that's what kids used to do.

L: My brother, Lawrence Thomas and Bob Badger used to go to the Lagoon and trap animals, for the fur. And I guess the Thomases ate

them.They came from Arkansas or someplace where they ate racoon etc.

SH: There's all kind of Muskrats, I don't know if they're there now. When I was a kid it was all fresh water. There was Cooper's Pond on Cooper road, artesian wells. It used to run into the Lagoon. I caught fish, Trout out of there. It ran all year round. there was always real nice water and was full of frogs, muskrat, racoons, ducks. The ranchers pumped it so bad they ruined the wells. Henry Neles was irrigating 500 acres with it. It's still there and I'm sure there's still water, artesian. I think the pond's still full. Henry Neles was on Llano road. And other people pumping out of it.

L: They did some diversion putting in a trout farm. That changed everything.

SH: The Lagoon was full over these French bullfrogs. (2 feet long) Remember on Robinson Road years ago, this fellow had a frog pond and raised them commercially. It's still there. During the Depression he went broke and let all the frogs go, and they went down the creek that runs through Ives Park, all artesian water too, and they got to the lagoon. Later, on they were huge, we'd take some to the Chinamen for frogs legs.

L: Roy Martin used to eat them all the time. He married a French lady from the war.

S: You take a bamboo stick and put a fish and a piece of red flannel on it and they snap at it. You had to sneak up on them. The lagoon had these big lily pads on it too. From the fresh water.

E: Isn't the Russian river fresh water.

S: Yeah, but there's so much apple waste in it. Acid in it. There used to be fish all the way down to the Russian River. There's a creek all the way, but over the years its filled in. There's still water there where the trestle (P&SR) is, used to go way back to Cooper's Pond. Now I think it dries out between Coopers and those ranches. The place where he had the frogs (on Robinson Rd) he had it all terraced. I used to deliver papers up there. I don't remember his name. It was just before you turn on Robinson Rd. the artesian well starts there. He had big ponds, it was all covered.

L: It goes through up to Pleasant Hill. The headwaters.

S: You know where they built the bowling alley, that used to be McNulty's property. When we were kids, we'd go out there and dig holes in the bank and water'd come running out.There were springs all over. On Fircrest Ave. They got about 60 houses on those spring fed wells. They are not on city water. I was doing some work for a couple people a few years ago and they were still on wells.

E: Belmont Terrace, the city says is also on their own water. I heard at a meeting about City water the other day.

S: Fiesta market is on their own well.

L: Where I live on DuFranc, across the street, the house was for sale, I looked at it and it had a faucet in the back yard connected to an artesian well. The city won't let them use it because they are hooked up to city water.

(More discussion of frog pond and water of laguna)

E: You mentioned Chinatown, do you remember Sebastopol's Chinatown.

SH: Behind Pellini's the little alley that goes through there, That was Chinatown. It went from Frizelle's that block and the next block and Brown street. That was all Chinatown.Behind Wyatt's. Houses on both side, and most were two story. Couple restaurants. Lotto parlor. Everyone in town went to buy their 5 cent tickets. Charlie was one of em, he was a little fat Chinaman, everybody loved. He had a little restaurant and lottery parlor. he was on Brown Street. There was another one behind Pellini's, that was a restaurant there and houses on both sides.

E: They were the Chinese community?.

SH: They were there until the Japanese came and the Chinese left. The Chinese left before the 1920's. The Japanese came in and took over. Remember Kong Kee, that was there where Diamond National was on the corner. Petaluma Ave. They had all kinds of stuff from China, it was a merchandise store. Then there was another little store down from there, Tammy Smith had the mill but this side of Kong Kee there was another little Chinese store. We used to go down there and buy rice candy, a nickel for a package.

L: I never went down there, my mother wouldn't let me but my brothers went.

S: Slaughterback (sp?) had the hardware store.

L: Bridgeford's Planing Mill was later.

S: Tammy had the planing mill too.

L: It was the same one?

S: Yeah, it's still there, some door outfit now.

L: Doesn't it have the old wording on it.

S: It might be up there on top. Right next to that was (?)

L: When did Tammy Smith die?

S: Years ago,

L: She had the beauty parlor. It was years and years, Seemed like she was a widow forever. I don't remember him. In the 20s.

S: No, probably in the 50s when John Colombo did.

L: They didn't have any children did they (Smith's)?

S: No, just Tammy and his wife.

L: Bridgefords are still around. Has the airport in Napa,

S: Flying service?

L: Max, Dick and Jenny Belle Bridgeford.

S: Chinatown, it was only 3 blocks long. Frizelle was there, that used to be Edwards owned it. Bill Edwards dad. On the other side of that was a packing house.

L: Do you ever see Bill Edwards?

S: All the time.

L: Is he ok.

S: I see him walking in the morning to Safeway usually

L: I've called his wife a dozen times and went to the house and said we want to come and talk to Bill Edwards and she says he can't remember anything and wouldn't get anything out of him and she won't let us come and talk to him.

S: Well maybe he can't remember. His father was born and raised out here by Darby Lane. His grandparents, his father lived there too.

L: Does he have any sisters or brothers.

S: I don't think so.

L: His parents played for dances and Eastern Star.

S: His mother was quite a musician. They had the feed store and Bill had trucks. Used to haul for his Dad. You know we had a lot of packing houses in town. I think there were 6. Where the Vets Memorial was there was one there. One next to Frizelle Enos, it burned in 1940, burned for about 6 months. Behind that where Lew Hart's was its still there, where they made the bathtubs, Russ Tie (sp?) I worked there and in the one on the corner. There was one, Speas, next to that was another one. They used to make boxes and carry shook and stuff.

L: I learned to cut apples in that one.

S: Where Food For Thought is now. Then we had, Barlow's that was out on Barlow Lane. Tommy and Charlotte took it over. Denman gave it em after Tom come back from the War (II). Tom's been in the business since he was a kid. About some of these historic buildings.: Next to the Main Street Saloon, which was Jack's bar, that was the old post office. There was a theatre, the old Strand, remember the El Rey, unfinished furniture store now on So. Main. Chaney's grocery was right next to the El Rey. On the corner there there was a beauty parlor that Paul Meeker had. On the corner next to the creek. On the other side, the Dept. of Agriculture, Soil Division, and Bill Allison's men's shop. (On So. Main Street) Across from the Chevron going north. Still is a beauty parlor. (west side of street). Then it was a paint store, the first one in town, red headed guy. Then he started what is now Sandy's. Not the

original Sandy.Next the empty lot that is fenced (at So.Main and Burnett) was the cream shop. Was it Johnny and Ann?

E: What era is this 20s, 30s, 40s?

S: From the 40s. They put that Union Station in the 60s. Across the street, Burnett, there was a barber shop, then Triggs.

L: Spillers was around the corner.

S: Remember on Burnett across from the Times where the empty lot is, there used to be a a hotel.

L: Across the street from that was a garage.

S: Borba had his old shop on that street then he moved down to the other end. E.I. Borba, the blacksmith. Rodney Miller's dad had his warehouse in the back of Triggs. All the coal and wood and stuff. On Main, but they had a rear entrance. It was a big building and they brought the engines in. Next to Triggs, the hotel, before Don's, Mazzuchi (sp?) Where the Greenhouse is, There was an old taxi stand and a shoe shine stand. On the corner of Bodega and Main was Golden Rule Market. That was Pete Wagesser (sp?) Theresa Felciano's brother. When that went out it was Western Auto, Jerry Rowe, originally it was Bill Williams, he had it first. Go up the corner, the Owl Cafe, barber shop (south side of Bodega/Main going west) there was a little alley. Ray Spillers had the harness shop and that goes way back. Another little Analy Hotel on that side and the funeral parlor, O'Leary's. There was a beauty parlor there too, Etta Nelson. Leo Skyver was her son. He was a friend of mine.

L: I lived in San Francisco for ten years, I kind of lost track from 1947 to 50s.

S: Right across from the Owl on the other side of Bodega behind Pease Drugstore was Spooner's grocery (northwest corner Bodega Ave. at main). Old Firehouse, alley and city hall. Tall with steeple. and Old Library, Carnegie. Back on Main at Bodega, other side, Pease Drug Store, next upstairs, Flemings Market. Shop then a bakery, then a soda fountain (says Laurie when she went to high school) Worth's Drug store, across the street right in the bank building. Bill Borba was next to that then he moved later by)where Roundtable is now) Tommasco's Drug store which became Medico later.

L: When did Butler's Insurance agent go into.

S: In Rosemary's garden, Archie Butler was in that building. Next to that was Starr Furniture (Copperfield's now)

L: Was Best in there?

S: No Best was on Bodega, originally there were in that bldg. Best was older than Archie, and I think they were at one time in the same bldg.

L: There was Metcalf Hardware store there too. Next to Pease.

S: Starr had the biggest bldg. Upstairs there was dentist. Higuera (?) Carl LaForce was there before he went to Calder.

L: You could go out the back of the bldg. and there was a railing you went from one bldg. to another. and steps that went down to an empty area. We used to run and chase each other.

E: The bldg. says Crawford on it, on the Pease/Main St. Theatre Bldg.

S: I don't remember a Crawford. Next to Starr's was Western Cleaners.

L: His name was Wester and the Cleaners Western.

S: Next to that a restaurant. What was his name? McIntyre. He lived on Calder. Next to Chaney. He was a great guy. Lived in the Hutton's.

E: Do you remember what the Starr furniture company sold?

S & L: They sold appliances, beds. They had great big showcases in the front, all glass. Door in the middle.

E: Did they make their own things?

S&L: No. Frigidaire, we bought a washing machine. They handled name brands. Noble and Ray.

L: Alice Bollinger told me she saved her babysitting money and bought a $10 stove.

S: Carlson's was Hopper's Dept. Store. He retired and moved to Tule Lake had a duck hunting lodge there. Across the street from Carlson's was an empty lot. After the war they put in a quonset hut and it was Purity. Next to that was a restaurant, Ann's Shack. The railroad track went right by the bldg. Crystal had the service station there, then the alley (Berry lane). The bldg. there was a dentist's office for a long time.

L: Miss Jones lived there. Nice steps up to her house. The first grade teacher.

S: Well then she moved down to Burnett. Oh I'm thinking of Mrs. Howard. I had Miss Jones as a teacher. She was mean.
and Miss Davies.

E: This brings us around to school. Where did you go to school?

S: Sebastopol Parkside, They had the old wooden school, basement and 2 stories. Then they built the new school in 1935. It was called Sebastopol Union Grammar School, the old one.

L: Then they built the new building next door, kindergarten, gym.

S: Then Analy, Analy and Seb. Un. Grammar School were built at the same time. WPA projects. The new post office built in 1935. Cornerstone at the driveway. I remember when they dedicated that everybody in town turned out for it. Class A post office in a town like this was something. No place to park, no cars then either.

The reason we got the class A, Art Point studios they did all the job printing they were selling big all over. Wedding announcements and others.

S & L: You know where that was? Keating St. the bank and it was next door, that was American Legion Hall, empty lot and service station on Corner, Charlie Beck (all this now S&L, Safeway parking lot) Before that it was Miller. I worked with Charlie. (Sam) Henry Martin, nursery. That was all kind of run down, there was an old house, who had that beauty parlor where they put the old Analy theatre. Frank Sousa's wife had it. Then an alley and bunch of shacks in the back. Shoe store back there, Fouts. I remember there was always mud holes back there, it never was paved. Keating or next to Rite Aid that was just a path. It went into Pitt Ave. Ivan Rowe he lived down by the creek.

L: I wrote a story about that little creek because that's when I lived on Healdsburg & Florence Ave. I'd cut through the back of Lawrence's and go down through the alley and through the creek and you had to go over the willow tree and over the water and pass this empty house.

S: That's where the Rowe's lived, a great big family. On the left side of the path there was a big two story bldg. Sonoma Co. Clinic, I used to clean that up. It was a big bldg. kind of a hall, a lodge hall, and they rented it. They had the rooms down stairs. Across the street, you remember the old Hillside hospital. Ray Burrows home now. A 7 bed hospital, I used to deliver the paper there. I wonder how anyone got up those steps to the front door of the hospital.

L: A steep driveway, then in back there was a burrow of rooms, because of Esther Walker lived there before or after and she gave dancing lessons and I took dancing lessons in the little house in back. Edith Badger told me she used to go there and babysit while Esther gave lessons.

S: The hospital went out many years ago, we didn't have a hospital for awhile til Al Helwig bought out Robinson. He was a judge wasn't he? that had Palm Drive. Had the road going up from the corner of Fannen to Petaluma. There were Palm Trees going up the drive. Big oak tree in the back, a limb came down, they had steps on it and a big tree house and he used to let us play in it. He was pretty sick but he was a nice old gentleman. There was a big hill next to the Robinson's and there was a big house on that, can't remember who lived there, had a swimming pool. That was a big deal when they flatened that out. Al Helwig added on to the house, he took the old house and kept adding on. 25 or 30 bed hospital when he quit.

L: I was in high school when I worked at the hospital so that had to be in the 30s. We didn't live on Eleanor near Palm Drive til I was in high school. We bought it in 1932.

E: You'd done a lot of jobs during your life, what did you start out doing after high school.

S: Well I was a plumber. But you had to do a lot of odds and ends, worked in sheds, nothing real fancy. Out on ranches.

L: You worked for my husband as a plumber.

S: I started out with Gene.

L: You know one thing I regret that I never did.I never put the Aho Bldg. on that bldg. we built. Why didn't I do that?

S: I helped him build it. This is on South Main, next to Fannen. (Aho Plumbing bldg.) Cement guy, Mike Ameral. Did the swimming pool at Ives. Had a plastering service too, with his brother Gus.

(more discussion of old times and friends) Sharps, McGrews. Tufts?

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